

## Flexibilities Introduced to Mitigate COVID-19 Pressures on Institutions

1. In the wake of the COVID-19 emergency, SFC engaged rapidly with institutions to provide reassurances that we would keep returns and reporting requirements to a minimum, focusing on absolute priorities to ensure continued compliance with legislative requirements. The following paragraphs outline the flexibilities introduced for institutions.
2. **Student Support:** we provided flexibility to colleges to redirect travel and childcare funds to discretionary funds; we removed the £4,000 cap on discretionary funds; and we provided flexibility to allow colleges to bridge the gap between the end of student support funding and the availability of benefits where students were unable to secure employment.
3. **Targets:** we confirmed that we would not recover funds for shortfalls against outcome agreement targets where these are related to COVID-19 for AY 2019-20. We subsequently confirmed the same position for AY 2020-21. For institutions delivering controlled subjects, we agreed to work with Scottish Government departments on the recovery of funds.
4. **One plus activity:** For 2019-20 we removed the 2.5% limit for college sector one plus activity to enable students to benefit from additional learning during the lockdown period. We also confirmed that credits were claimable for timetabled guidance on college sector higher education programmes and we updated credit guidance to reflect this position.
5. **Outcome Agreements:** we agreed to accept the near-final Outcome Agreements that institutions had been working on pre-lockdown and subsequently agreed that we would not ask Governing Bodies to sign Outcome Agreements in the usual way, nor would we publish them. We committed to development of a new accountability framework to balance flexibility and accountability in the AY 2020-21.
6. **Extension of reporting deadlines:** we extended reporting deadlines for the following:
  - Institutional Efficiency Returns (3 April 2020 until 30 September 2020)
  - Suspension of the REF (agreed in partnership with UKRI and other funding bodies)
  - We entered into discussions with EHRC to discuss streamlining of statutory equality reporting
7. **Postponement of Returns:** we agreed that the following returns did not have to be made to previously set deadlines:

- The Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey (college sector), which had been due to be returned at the end of April.
  - The formal quarter three Further Education Statistics (FES) data return (college sector), which was due at the beginning of July.
  - The submission of the updated Access and Inclusion Strategies (college sector).
  - The submission of updated Institutional Gender Action Plans.
  - Reporting on the Upskilling Fund activity (university sector).
  - Submission of the Final Statistics Return to SFC for AY 2019-20 (university sector)
  - Formal reporting on mental health funding – in recognition of the pressures on teams we worked closely with mental health leads to agree a more proportionate form of reporting
  - Completion of colleges' Flexible Workforce Development Fund activity report for 2019-20 – we sought agreement from Scottish Government for this to be extended.
8. **Quality Assurance:** in liaison with Education Scotland and QAA for the college and university sectors respectively, we agreed to postpone some planned quality assurance activity, including an amended timeline for ELIRs in the university sector.
9. **Pausing of Projects:** we agreed to pause the following work programmes:
- Enhancing our in-year data collections and access threshold data.
  - Our consultation on the University Innovation Fund.
10. **Conditions of Grant:** we agreed that where confirmation of an acceptance of grant was required, while we would ask the institution to send us a scanned signed copy, we would accept a confirmation email from a Senior Officer of the institution.
11. **College Credit guidance:** we published guidance that enables colleges to claim credits for students who need to repeat units as a result of COVID-19 (deferred students). As a consequence, we removed references to “one-plus”. We also enabled colleges to claim for timetabled guidance on full-time HE courses, which brings this into line with full-time FE courses. In order to help colleges shift their provision towards additional demand for mainstream provision aimed at future skills areas and provide shorter re-training, re-skilling and upskilling courses we have required colleges to deprioritise school/college activity outwith senior phase; and additional units to full-time FE students, unless they are in response to COVID-19 (i.e. deferred units or deemed essential in terms of future employability or progress to higher education).